Canons of Criticism.

C. W. Macfarlane.

PR
504
M33

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. PR Copyright No. 504

Shelf M23

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Copyright, 1885,
by
C. W. Macfarlane.

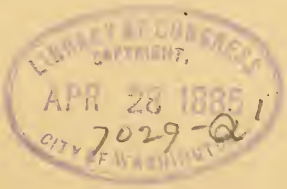
Canons of Criticism.

An Introduction to

The Development of English Poetry.

By

C. W. Macfarlane.



PR 504
M23

Contents.

	PAGE.
Poetry	7
Poet *versus* Philosopher	29
Repose	43
Healthfulness	59
Humor	71
Resume	87

Preface.

SOME years ago we attempted to sketch "The Development of English Poetry," but at the very outset found ourselves confronted with this formidable difficulty, that there is no generally accepted definition of Poetry. While there is undoubtedly some agreement as to the merit of special lines, and many attempts to define Poetry or to formulate a criterion by which all lines might be safely judged, yet are these conflicting in the extreme, while none seem willing to give a reason for the faith that is in them. Until this is done, until some general agreement has been established among men in regard to a criterion which shall say; this is of low, and this of high degree, no discussion of "The

Development of English Poetry" can be with any great profit.

Recognizing this, we have endeavored to find some strand of agreement running through the mass of conflicting opinion. Where one has seemed arrayed against another, we have striven, not so much to develop a new and different truth, as to harmonize their contradiction, holding it as highly probable that they were but different phases of the same truth.

Out of the original discussion there have grown definitions of many of the terms in current use in criticism, and yet about which much difference of opinion exists. Lastly we were constrained to define Humor, and this widening of the discussion has compelled the seemingly pretentious title "Canons of Criticism;" and yet that the principles here enunciated have a wider application than to Poetry, he who runs may read.

That the time has come when, if Critical Literature is to make further advance, there must be some general agreement as to the meaning of the terms employed, there can be no question, though how successful we have

been in our attempts to give definition to some of these terms others must judge. This, at least, we may say: "It is an honest Ghost."

C. W. M.

No. 4728 Green Street,
Germantown,
Philadelphia.

Poetry.

CRITICAL literature has of late been much perturbed by the question, whether in the brilliant ornateness of Shelley, or in the serene contemplation of Wordsworth, is found the greater poetic genius. Nor can the perturbation be confined within the girth of the original question; for, take what side you will, the mere assertion that certain lines are superior in poetic merit to certain others commits you to the proposition, that some measure, some test of poetic excellence, is possible.

And so, no longer contented with vague generalities, men seek for such a criterion, as will enable them to determine for any and all

examples of poetic endeavor, the order of their going.

It is not possible within the limits of these pages to review all previous definitions; but if we can find that among them there are two or more under one or the other of which all others may be included, we can expedite our discussion by confining ourselves to these, and so, building upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets of afore-determined truth, may be led to a definition of at least as great exactness and generality as any yet proposed.

Conspicuous among recent efforts in this direction is that of Mr. Matthew Arnold, who in the preface to his "Selections from Wordsworth's Poems" writes:

"It is important that we hold fast to this: that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of the poet lies in his beautiful and powerful application of ideas to life, to the question how to live."

In the "Contemporary Review," December, 1881, Mr. Alfred Austin combats this, and offers in its stead the following: "Poetry is a transfiguration of life; in other words, an

imaginative representation in verse or rhythm, of whatever men perceive, feel, think, or do." "The relative greatness of a poet depends upon the amount of life he has transfigured; in other words, upon how much of whatever men perceive, feel, think or do, he has in verse or rhythm represented imaginatively."

What, in simple, are we to understand from these criteria? Mr. Austin interprets Mr. Arnold as declaring that it is in the criticism or philosophy of life, in the *thought* contained in any lines, that we must find the measure of the poet's work and genius, while his own may be fairly interpreted as declaring, that the poet evidences his genius *in a special mode of representing* the thought, or by his "*transfiguration*" of the same. But what of this "transfiguration," for before passing judgment upon a statement, we must needs have some clear idea as to the meaning of the terms employed.

Among the many examples quoted in the course of Mr. Austin's argument is the following from Wordsworth's "Simon Lee the Old Huntsman:"

"And he is lean and he is sick;
His body dwindled and awry
Rests upon ankles swollen and thick:
His legs are thin and dry.
One prop he has and only one,
His wife, an aged woman,
Lives with him near the waterfall,
Upon the village common," etc.

"Need I hesitate to say," writes Mr. Austin, and we must perforce agree with him, "that, though written by Wordsworth, this is not poetry?" Farther on he writes:— "If any one wants to see how the same writer can lift narrative from the ground and endue it with the ethereal buoyancy of poetry, let him turn to 'The Leech-Gatherer.'

"Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven,
I saw a man before me unawares;
The oldest man he seemed that ever wore gray hair.
Himself he pressed, his body, limbs and face,
Upon a long gray staff of shaven wood;
And still as I drew near with gentle pace
Upon the margin of that moorish flood
Motionless as a cloud the old man stood,
That heareth not the loud winds when they call,
And moveth all together, if it move at all."

"The peom is of some length," continues Mr. Austin, "and therefore cannot be quoted in its integrity. But anybody can perceive at once, that the narrative is conducted at a different elevation from that of 'Simon Lee.' We are listening on the high mountain and the old man is *transfigured*." Now while all this is doubtless true, yet have we somewhat against the vague indefiniteness of the term—transfigured—since, like charity, it may cover a multitude of sins.

We would further urge, that the criterion which is the outcome of this, not only contains "nothing novel, nothing strange," which were an indifferent fault, but what is more serious, it falls short, both in generality and exactness, of a criterion offered some three centuries ago. For as Sir Philip Sidney has written in his "Defense of Poesy:"—"It is not rhyming or versing that maketh a poet, but it is the *feigning of notable images* of virtues, vices, or what else, with that *delightful teaching* which must be the right describing note to know a poet by * * * * he coupleth the general notion with the particular example."

That in this we have a criterion of greater exactness and generality than that offered by Mr. Austin, may be readily shown.

First notice that it holds, and we think rightly, that metrical structure is not an essential or necessary condition of Poetry. In its early days, ere Poetry and Music had become differentiated from each other, or when all Poetry was recited or sung, the bond between them was much closer than it is now, when a Wordsworth enjoins you—Read my lines rhythmically if you can, but, at all events, read them so as to get the sense. Again, if, as Mr. Austin states, we can have rhythmical Prose and unrhythmical Poetry, rhythm can neither be peculiar nor essential to Poetry. Or while the Poet does still avail himself of this as an additional source of pleasure, yet may he evidence great genius as a Poet, though his rhythm be never so faulty.

Notice, too, that Sidney gives definition to Mr. Austin's vague term—"transfiguration,"—in that he takes cognizance of its cause, the "feigning of notable images." Turn to the lines from "The Leech-Gatherer,"

in which the presence of this so-styled "transfiguration" is most manifest, and you certainly find present *figures* of great credit, while the lines from "Simon Lee" lack all creditable figure. So throughout all the examples which Mr. Austin marshals in defense of his criterion, wherever we have "transfiguration" we find "notable images" or *figures*, while in those lines which fail of any "transfiguration" *figures* are either entirely absent, or, when present, are of but little merit.

But though it be shown that the "transfiguration" of Mr. Austin is the "feigning of notable images" or *figures* of Sir Philip Sidney, yet does the question remain whether, after all, this "transfiguration," this "feigning of notable images" or *figures*, is the essential and peculiar element of Poetry, since at the hands of a most able critic, Mr. Matthew Arnold, we have the statement that "Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life." Of this more again, sufficient for the present is the fact, which the reader can verify for himself, that under one or the other of the above all attempts to formulate a criterion may be included; or, while men may and do differ

as to which of these is the true measure of poetic merit, they are yet substantially agreed that in one or the other, in the character of the figure, or in the character of the thought, the essential and peculiar element of Poetry must be found.

In favor of the latter assumption it might be urged, and as even the advocate of figure must admit, that thought is essential, since there can be no figure save as it expresses some thought. Further, that thought is the true measure of poetic excellence seems evidenced by the fact that the highest Poetry is ever the most thoughtful. On the other hand, it might be urged against this, that the pleasure due to the beauty, pathos, sublimity, etc., of the scene, conception, or thought represented, is not peculiar to Poetry, but is alike common to nature, philosophy, etc.; while in the highest Poetry we have not only the greatest thought, but *figures* of the greatest merit as well. So, too, when we turn to the opinions that obtain in regard to particular examples, as the lines already quoted from "Simon Lee," while there are those who, with Mr. Austin, will declare

of this that it is barren of all poetic merit, there are others who will regard it as within the limits of Poetry.

What shall we say, then,—that no consensus exists, and hence that no definition is possible? Not at all. For while men have failed to agree in their attempts to define Poetry; failed to agree whether such protozoa of literature as the lines from "Simon Lee" shall be included under the head of Poetry or of Prose, —they do not fail to agree that these lines are infinitely inferior in poetic merit to such lines as Mr. Austin has quoted from "The Leech-Gatherer." Here, then, in this substantial agreement, we must find the basis of any satisfactory definition.

Were the thought expressed in these examples essentially different, they would help us but little in our present difficulty; but, fortunately, the thought is much the same in both — a superannuated old man from the lower walks of life—and yet despite this fact, *that the thought is the same*, the poetic merit of the lines varies most widely. Surely, much may be seen in this.

But that the above may be perfectly clear let us take another pair of examples.

The scholarly Horatio salutes the breaking day:

> "But look the morn in russet mantle clad
> Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill."

That this is Poetry all will agree, and yet how it pales before those marvellous lines from the 33d Sonnet:

> "Full many a glorious morning have I seen
> *Flatter* the mountain-top with *sovereign eye*."

That in both of these we have the same scene, conception, or thought,—morn,—is manifest, the figure alone changing with the ascent from the lowest to the highest tones of the poetical gamut. In view of this, may we not conclude that the measure of poetic excellence must be found, not in the character of the scene, conception, or thought represented, but in the terms of the figure by which this thought is represented, or that:—*Poetry is the expressing of thought by means of figure.*

It does not tell against this that it rele-

gates some of the protozoa of literature to the domain of Prose. Nor does it, as you shall see further on, contradict what of truth there is in the assertion that the highest Poetry is the most thoughtful. For the present, however, let us inquire whether or not our definition will make rational, or give coherence to our many vague notions about Poetry.

Among all our ideas in regard to Poetry, perhaps none is held with greater assurance than this, that:—*Poetry is, in some way, the opposite of Prose.*

We feel that while both express thought by means of language, yet is there some antithesis between them, of which cognizance must be taken, in any attempt to define either. Argument is hardly necessary to show that all figure is a substitution of the concrete for the abstract, and if, as Coleridge has maintained, Scientific is a better term than Prose, it is then manifest, since science is ever a seeking for broader generalizations, that the Scientific or Prose method of expressing thought, is the substitution of the general or abstract, for the particular or concrete. It

says to a child: "One and two make three," and only in the event of his failing to understand this does it deign to say: "If you had two apples, and I should give you two more apples," etc., or reversing its method, it then substitutes the familiar for the unfamiliar, the particular or concrete, for the general or abstract, or it has recourse to the method of the Poet, who, as Sidney has said, "coupleth the general notion with the particular example." Here, then, in germ, we have the method of the Poet, his grandest efforts being akin to the above.

If he wishes to convey an idea of the whiteness of his mistress' hand, it is a lily hand; or if it is the loveliness of her voice, it is liquid music. If, in more ambitious mood, he seeks to convey an idea of the relation of life to eternity, he says:

> "Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
> Stains the white radiance of eternity."
>
> *Adonais.* SHELLEY.

or "he coupleth the general notion"—life—"with the particular example"—dome of many-colored glass,—"feigning notable images," or

figures. While in contrast with this the Philosopher writes: "Life is the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations," substituting the general or abstract for the particular or concrete. Not only does this make clear the difference between Prose and Poetic composition, but it will also enable us to distinguish between Imaginative and Fanciful Poetry, a problem which has troubled criticism not a little; Wordsworth, Leigh Hunt and Coleridge severally devoting themselves to its solution.

We have seen, that men in their endeavor to convey the more abstract ideas, are constrained to substitute the concrete for the abstract, and, as Sidney has noticed, there is delightfulness or pleasure peculiar to this mode of teaching,—a pleasure which, in a large measure, is independent of the character of the thought to be conveyed.

Mercutio, chafing the love-lorn Romeo, says:

> "O, then I see Queen Mab has been with you.
> Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut,
> Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,
> Time out of mind the fairies' coach-maker."

In this the figures, as in the transfiguration of an empty hazel-nut into a chariot, made by the joiner squirrel, etc., are the source of exquisite pleasure, and yet the thought is of but little importance. Mercutio, indeed, acknowledges this, saying:

> "True, I talk of dreams,
> Which are the children of an *idle brain*."

And that the above is Fanciful Poetry we need hardly urge.

In Imaginative Poetry, however, the mind is no longer idle, but is *possessed* by a thought or feeling, and, seeking utterance, finds it most readily in figure.

> "Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
> You cataracts and hurricanes spout
> Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
> You sulphurous, and thought-executing fires,
> Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
> Singe my white head!" *Lear.*

That, in this, the figures are the creatures of the great wrongs that hold the old king's mind in

thrall, or that they are Imaginative, none will question; and I fancy that those who have followed the argument thus far, will begin to realize that the definitions—Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life and Poetry is a transfiguration of life—are more akin than at first sight appeared. For it is undoubtedly true that the most marvellous transfigurations are ever those in which the Poet has been seriously concerned about the question "how to live."

Here then we have the real distinction between Imaginative and Fanciful Poetry. In the former, the mind is possessed with a particular thought or feeling compelling utterance in figure; while the latter is rather "the play of the mind," in which, as in Mercutio's lines, figures are created whose only reason for being is their own delightfulness; the child of simple-featured utility become "the world's fresh ornament." They are not, then, as Coleridge has maintained, the products of different faculties, but of one and the same faculty—Imagination—acting under different conditions. Nor are new terms necessary, as Leigh Hunt declares, for those we have are most apt.

But to conclude, since even in the most Fanciful Poetry, there is some remnant of thought, we can for the present write, and it has a familiar look : *Poetry is the expressing of thought by means of figure, by the substitution of the concrete for the abstract, the conceiving, mental picturing, or imagining of the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar.*

It may be asked, How is this mental picturing of one in terms of the other effected? In reply, we can only say that in all such instances though the conceptions brought together are *essentially different in kind, or are at remove from each other*, yet is there some similarity between them; and as an outcome of our faith in causality, we instinctively merge into each other, or mentally picture as one, conceptions that are similar; not that either is entirely lost in the other, but instead there results a new conception, in which both have part and lot. So when we read in "Winter's Tale" of—

"Daffodils
"That come before the swallows dare, and take
The winds of March with beauty."

we mentally picture the winds of March as a burly Ingomar, and daffodils as a fair Parthenia, by whom the burly fellow is enamored and subdued; or conceptions different in kind, or at *remove* from each other, are brought together because of a subtile similarity between them. Remembering, then, that the Poet is distinguished from other artists by the material in which he works, namely, language, we might write, and this is the final form of our definition: *Poetry is the expressing of thought by means of figure, by the substitution of the concrete for the abstract, or by the bringing together or combining of conceptions at remove because of a similarity between them, thus creating a new conception.* This the creation of the Poet? This the transfiguration of Mr. Austin?

It will be remembered, that Messrs. Arnold and Austin developed a sort of corollary to their fundamental proposition, and for greater convenience in determining the comparative merits of a poet's genius or work, let us do likewise, expediting the discussion, as before, by comparing examples of unequal

merit, in which the same scene or conception is treated. Take the lines already quoted:

"But look the morn in russet mantle clad
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill."
Hamlet.

"Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain-top with sovereign eye."
33d Sonnet.

In both of these morn is transfigured, or represented imaginatively, and yet with what differing skill. In the first, the idea of progression, which is associated with our conceptions of morn, is readily transposed into walking, an action associated with our conceptions of man; adding to this the brilliant coloring of the dawn, the Poet ushers in the morn as a courtier gay, walking o'er the but now night-kissed hills. But though in this the remove between morn and courtier is considerable, yet how much greater is it in the second example. What a charge is brought against the morn! Its rosy tipping of the hills is "*flattering the mountain-top.*" Even if the poet had stopped at this, the remove and

poetic merit would have been infinitely greater than in the previous example; but notice, that as each under eye is flattered if the king but deigns to look at them, so morn

"Flatters the mountain-top with *sovereign eye.*"

May we not then conclude, that poetic merit or genius must, in part, be measured by the remove between the conceptions brought together in his creations?

But what of the other variable in our problem, namely, similarity? For answer let us turn to Shakespeare's 2d Sonnet:

"When forty winters shall besiege thy brow
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery so gazed on now
Will be a tattered weed of small worth held."

In this, as the succeeding points of similarity between the conceptions,—a face assailed by time, and the siege of a city,—are suggested; time and the assailants—wrinkles; and the trenches of the besieging party; the brilliant color of youth; and the gay livery of the defending soldiers; the fusion and trans-

figuration increases, till it seems almost complete, or the Poetry varies, not alone with the remove, but with the similarity as well. Hence we may write: *The greatest Poetry is the result of maximum remove with maximum similarity*, or it is the parabola of thought in whose equation we may substitute for x and y, remove and similarity.

But whither does this heresy of greater exactness lead us? It is long since it was written, that unity in variety is the essential condition of all beauty; and modern philosophy, putting this in other terms, has written: "The primitive source of æsthetic pleasure is that character in the combination which makes it such as to exercise the faculties affected in the most complete ways, with the fewest drawbacks from excessive exercise;" or, in the terms of the older dictum, the greater the variety the greater the exercise; this carried too far would fatigue the faculties, aud as a preventative of this we have unity, which enables the mind to grasp the conception of form or aught else with less effort; or we have as the general condition—maximum

exercise with minimum fatigue. Returning to our corollary, it will hardly be necessary to show that in maximum remove we have maximum variety or exercise, and that in maximum similarity we have maximum unity or minimum fatigue, and hence, that Poetry is one with all beauty.

What shall we say, then? That this reduces Poetical creation to a mere mechanical operation, capable of being measured in terms of foot—pounds? Mayhap. Yet would we hold that the position here taken, if true, instead of destroying our belief in the creative genius of the Poet, strengthens its hands by enabling us to think of him as we do of the Philosopher,—as an intellectual development, and not, as Coleridge has put it, as an "inspired idiot;" for, as we shall take occasion to show, Poet and Philosopher evidence their genius in intellectual operations that are identical.

Let us not fear that in so doing we shall put aside the veil of the "holy of holies," and make bare the fact that it contains naught but the rod of Aaron and the pot of manna.

Naught but these? And was there no mystery there? Yea, verily the mystery of the worship of a God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Poet versus Philosopher.

CARLYLE, in his "Heroes and Hero-Worship," has maintained that if a man is great in any one department of life, he would, of necessity, be great in any other to which he might devote himself.

That there is in this somewhat of truth few will question, though among the admirers of the Poet or Philosopher there are many who would urge, as its "rock of offense," that the greatness of the former is evidenced in operations essentially different from those upon which depend the greatness of the latter; while the devotees of each will cry out in antiphonal response, "Great is our god above all gods!"

Now, without committing ourselves to Carlyle's general proposition, we may yet

question the exactness of the above objection, and would hold, as in the previous article, that the genius of Poet and Philosopher are alike intellectual developments. Nor is it meant by this that in some vague and indefinite way the creation of the Poet is an intellectual operation, and that, in some less vague but different way, the work of the Philosopher is intellectual; but that both evidence their genius in mental processes that are identical.

We have heard so much of late about the wonderful child Induction, that many have been persuaded his elder should do him reverence. Indeed, so largely has this notion obtained, that the genius of the Philosopher is evidenced in his induction, that it has compelled a protest from one whose "philosophic sagacity" few will question.

In his "Use and Limits of the Imagination in Science," page 53, Professor Tyndall says: "Thus the vocation of the true experimentalist may be defined as the continued exercise of *spiritual insight*, and its incessant correction and realization. His experiments constitute a

body of which his *purified intuitions* are as it were the soul." Or, according to this, the genius of the Philosopher is displayed, not in the checking of his inferences, not in his Induction, but in the inferences themselves; in his "spiritual insight," his "purified intuitions." But writers of this ilk are not apt to content themselves with such vague terms, and so we find him asking on page 16: "How, then, are those hidden things to be revealed? We are gifted with the power of *Imagination*, and by this power we can lighten the darkness which surrounds the world of sense. Bounded and conditioned by Co-operant Reason, *Imagination* becomes the mightiest instrument of the physical discoverer. Newton's passage from a falling apple to a falling moon was at the outset a leap of the *Imagination*."

Here we have a somewhat more definite term than "spiritual insight" or "purified intuitions," and we all realize, in a general way, that, in the exercise of this faculty of Imagination, we imagine, or mentally picture, something with which we are not familiar. But let us not anticipate ourselves; and since it is

our desire out of its own mouth to convict Philosophy, we will again subpœna a not unwilling witness. Mr. Spencer, in his "Principles of Psychology," Vol. II., page 534, in speaking of Imagination, says: "When consciousness is habitually occupied with greatly involved aggregates of ideas which cohere with other such aggregates of ideas that are very various and not very strong, there arises a possibility of *combining them in ways not given in experience.* Gaining greater freedom as it reaches the advanced stages of complexity and multiformity, thought acquires an excursiveness such that with the aid of slight suggestions—slight impulses from accidental circumstances—its highly composite states enter into *combinations* never before formed; and so there result *conceptions which we call original.*" Or Imagination—in the exercise of which, according to Mr. Tyndall, the Philosopher displays his genius—is, according to Mr. Spencer, a combining of conceptions, thus creating a so-called original conception, or one not given in experience.

But how is this combination effected? It

is hardly a satisfactory answer to say, as above, that it is due to "slight impulses from accidental causes," and one cannot but wonder that a writer usually so exact should content himself with this, especially when on page 281 of the same volume he has written: "From the most complex and most abstract inferences down to the most rudimentary intuitions, all intelligence proceeds by the establishment of relations of likeness and unlikeness." Accept this, and it follows then, as night the day, that the combination effected in the imagination of the Philosopher is due to his recognition of a similarity between phenomena.

Newton's leap of imagination was not from an apple to a moon, but from a *falling* apple to a *falling* moon, or, as he himself has said: "There is a certain style"—method or similarity—"in the operations of divine wisdom, in the perception of which philosophical sagacity and genius seem chiefly to consist."

May we not, then, write that the Philosopher evidences his genius in the exercise of his Imagination; in the bringing together or

combining of conceptions at remove, by means of similarity, thus creating a new conception?

That the Poet is of "*Imagination* all compact" is generally recognized; but that the identity of his intellectual process with that of the Philosopher may be beyond question, let us turn to the definition developed in the previous article: *Poetry is the expressing of thought by means of figure, by the substitution of the concrete for the abstract, or by the bringing together or combining of conceptions at remove, because of a similarity between them, thus creating a new conception;* or both Poet and Philosopher evidence their genius in the combining of conceptions at remove by means of similarity."

In what, then, do they differ? eventually, it may be, in this: from one we derive pleasure, and from the other profit; but fundamentally, in the fact, that while the Philosopher seeks after the truth lest haply he might find it, the Poet's only endeavor is to make that truth which he apprehends present to the minds of others.

'Tis true the former wishing to convey his

subtilties to others is ofttimes compelled to express them in concrete terms, thus poaching upon the fair preserve of the Poet; but in general, anxious that he shall convey the truth and nothing but the truth, the Philosopher avoids this trespass. Confining himself to the abstract, scientific, or prose method of expressing thought, he writes as we have seen: "Life is the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations."

While the Poet writes:

> "Life like a dome of many-colored glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity."

But while thus differing in purpose, and in the mode of expressing thought, yet, since both evidence their genius by the same intellectual operation, it follows, that any test of the greatness of one is equally applicable to the other. If it be true, as developed in a previous article, that in poetic creation, the greatest is that in which we have maximum remove together with maximum similarity, then must this be likewise true of philosophic insight, sagacity or genius.

But though we establish the same test for both, yet will some find it hard to decide which they would rather have written, the Sonnets of Shakespeare or the Principia of Newton. For if it be granted, as Mr. Spencer has maintained, that intellectual development is measured by the degree of re-presentation, the abstraction, the subtilty of the thoughts entertained, then might it be urged, that though the Philosopher has done marvellous things amid the subtilties of matter and force, with their resultant—motion,—he has hardly as yet dared the greater subtilties of motive and character, with their resultant—action,—the " missing science " of a recent writer. In the meantime, the never-ceasing prelude of all science, —Art—has for generations past, in the person of the Dramatic Poet, been dealing with these greater subtilties.

But in questions touching us so nearly, it is difficult to preserve that mental equipoise or elevation, that will enable us to see both sides of a truth with equal clearness. Hence, fearing dogmatism more than error, let us for the present content ourselves with

the assumption, that so far as intellect is concerned, he who wrote the Sonnets might have written the Principia, and he who wrote the Principia might have written the Sonnets.

The reservation—so far as intellect is concerned—is, however, a recognition of this important fact, that while the Philosopher and Poet evidence their genius by the same intellectual operation, yet their difference in purpose results in a difference in the general nervous condition under which their intellects operate. One is without all shows and forms of emotion, while the other does his best work under the stimulus of emotion or other nervous excitement.

It is related of the actor, McCready, that before entering upon a scene in which he had to portray intense passion, he raced around behind the flies so that by the energy of his motion, he might stimulate himself up to the portrayal of such passion. Now it seems not improbable, that the Poet ofttimes adopts a similar method; not necessarily physical action, but in some way like actor and orator he must, to use a homely phrase, warm up to

his subject, in order to write his more impassioned lines.

On the other hand, the imagination of the Philosopher, cribbed, cabined and confined as it is by his Induction, by the necessity to check his inferences, lacks this stimulus; but having it, who shall say by what lengths such running leaps of his imagination would distance its present standing jumps.

In this warming up to his subject, this stimulating of the Poet's mind in order to write his more impassioned lines, we have the soul of truth in the absurd notion that, in order to write great Poetry, we need only to feel deeply. Absurd, because great Poetry necessitates not only deep feeling to stimulate the mind, but far more than this, that the intellect so stimulated should be great.

So confused are the prevailing ideas in this regard, that many have come to think of the Poet, as an "inspired idiot," waiting for the visitation of some wandering muse. It is doubtless true that the Poet's mind may be stimulated to such a degree as to be unconscious of the effort put forth in its creation; nevertheless,

these creations are, as we have seen, the product of the same intellectual action as that in which the Philosopher evidences his genius.

It were hardly well to close this article without noticing statements that have of late appeared with increased frequency; namely, that the decrease of picture-words, or the increase of abstract terms in language, is evidence that Poetry has fallen in "the sere and yellow leaf," or that the present unparalleled strides of science are for Poetry "the prelude to the omen coming on."

Those who have followed the argument thus far will realize how far this is from the truth; for not only is it true that the higher the Poetry the more subtile the abstractions dealt with, but the more abstract are the terms employed, or with the growing abstraction in language, Poetry does of necessity keep pace. Take the following lines from Shakespeare's "Lucrece:"

> "Her lily hand, her rosy cheek lies under,
> *Cozening* the pillow of a lawful kiss."

It is manifest that the first line, with its picture words, lily hand, rosy cheek, is, in poetic merit,

infinitely inferior to the second line, where pillow begs cheek, his mistress, for a lover's fee, while hand, pale, cozening rogue, yea, ermine clad, does bar the owner of his rights.

So, too, it goes for the saying, that the thought or conception expressed is more subtile, and the term "cozening," on which the great beauty of the second line depends, is more abstract than any term in the first line; or, in a general way, the higher the Poetry the more subtile is the thought, and the more abstract the terms employed. Again, turn to Wordsworth's sonnet on "Mutability," in which one can almost fancy an adumbration of the farthest reaches of the modern teaching of evolution.

"From low to high doth dissolution climb,
And sinks from high to low along a scale
Of awful notes, whose concord shall not fail,
A musical but melancholy chime,
Which they can hear who meddle not with crime
Nor avarice nor over-anxious care."

When has the melancholy music of the eternal cycles of evolution and dissolution been

more bravely chanted? Yea, though chaos is come again,

"Truth fails not; though her outward forms that bear
The longest date do melt like frosty rime,
That in the morning whitened hill and plain
And is no more; drop like the tower sublime
Of yesterday, which royally did wear
Its crown of weeds, *but could not even sustain*
Some casual shout that broke the silent air,
Or the unimaginable touch of time."

How has the abstract of yesterday become the concrete of to-day; yea, though science stride never so far, Poetry can but rejoice in its advance since every discovery of the former must needs become a coigne of vantage, from which the latter will make yet higher flights. "Put a girdle round the world in forty minutes" you may, but the Poet's Ariel sprite will answer make:

"I drink the air before me
And return."

Yea, though speculation take to itself the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of space, yet must it declare of Poetry—Thou wert there also.

Repose.

WERE other argument necessary to prove that the character of the scene, or conception which the Poet seeks to make present to our minds, cannot be relied upon as a measure of his genius, it might be drawn from the preceding article. For if it is not in his observation of facts, but in his recognition of the subtile relations between them, in his combination of them, that the Philosopher evidences his genius, how much more must it be true, that the Poet's genius is evidenced, not by the character of the scene, conception, or thought represented, but by his combining of these in ways not given in experience, thus creating new conceptions.

Perhaps the mind could better content

itself with this if it could understand how it is that men, some of them critics of unquestioned ability, have been betrayed into the belief, that the measure of the Poet's genius is found in the character of the thought. In the first place, familiar as we now are with Poetry in its more evolved forms, we are apt to regard it merely as a source of pleasure, apt to lose sight of its utilitarian origin in the desire to express thought, and so are prone to estimate the poetic merit of any lines, in terms of the pleasure afforded, without regard as to how much of this is due to the thought, and how much to the figure.

Again, and this is a fact calculated to deceive the very elect themselves, the highest Poetry is ever the most thoughtful, or is Imaginative. We have seen in the first article, that, despite this, the thought cannot be relied upon as a measure of poetic excellence, yet does the question remain, How are these facts to be reconciled?

Recalling now the fact, that profound emotion or thought may act as a stimulus upon the mind of the Poet, much as the actors'

preliminary run behind the scene, and we can readily understand why profound thought may be, and ofttimes is, associated with the highest Poetry. Not only so, but if the conception to be represented be a subtile one, the possible remove between it and its concrete is greater, and hence, greater figure or Poetry is made possible. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the thought cannot be relied upon as a measure of the poet's genius.

What shall we say then,—that the Poet should ignore all pleasure due to the beauty, pathos, sublimity, etc., of the scene or conception represented; that it is a matter of indifference whether these be pleasant or otherwise? Not at all! When Macbeth says:

> "Here lay Duncan,
> His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood,
> And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature
> For ruin's wasteful entrance; there the murtherers,
> Steep'd in the colors of their trade, *their daggers*
> *Unmannerly breech'd with gore.*"

He doubtless gives offense to some, because of the inelegance of the word "breeched," for

much profound criticism has been called in to exorcise this spirit of evil. "It is breached," says one, "retched or rusted," says another; and, all the while, a most notable creation stares them in the face, for as a man's leg was covered for part of its length with knee-breeches, so the daggers were covered or breeched with gore, and unmannerly so, because it was the upper part of the dagger from knee to waist that was uncovered or exposed. Now for the moral of this tale:—while the elegance or inelegance, the pleasantness or unpleasantness, of the conception "breeched," is in no sense a measure of the Poet's genius, yet by so much as it offends, it must diminish the *total pleasure* to be derived from the lines. And as Poetry has now the twofold mission to teach and to give pleasure, the Poet in general avoids such offenses, and avails himself of the beauty, pathos, sublimity, etc., of the scene or conception represented, as additional sources of pleasure. Nevertheless, he needs to have a care, in so doing, that the place of his own great art is not usurped by things of less repute. Not only so, but, as we hope to show, in the highest

reaches of that art he is prone to ignore the pleasure from these latter sources.

To that end note, that it has been urged, and as a fault in him, that Shakespeare avoids the grand, the sublime in nature. It is even said that, when he does attempt these things, he is not successful in his treatment of them, offering as an instance his description of the cliffs of Dover, lines which Johnson maintains are not as fine as certain others, which he quotes from Congreve.

Let us possess our souls in patience, however, for, much as we may dislike to own it, Johnson is undoubtedly nearer the truth, in his estimate of this particular example, than the critic who indulged in the bit of extravagance, "he who can read this description without becoming dizzy, has either a very steady head or a very hard one." Nevertheless, the general conclusion, that Shakespeare is unequal to the grand, the sublime, etc., is not only without sufficient warrant, but is a positive misapprehension of the facts, resulting, as we think, from the very transcendency of his skill in the handling of these things.

Let us, however, here take note of another opinion in regard to Shakespeare's Poetry, which has obtained even more largely than the above, namely, that there is in it a marvellous simplicity, a restfulness, or, better still, a *repose* seldom found elsewhere. So characteristic is this of his work, that when found in the lines of others, men speak of them as Shakespearean, as when Milton says:

"Such sweet compulsion doth in music lie,"

or Shelley tells of clouds that wander in thick flocks along the mountains.

"Shepherded by the slow, unwilling wind."

Again, when Wordsworth, in one of his most exquisite lines, speaks of a spray of autumn leaves as

"October's workmanship to rival May,"

or Keats, in his last sonnet sees,

"The moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablutions, around earth's human shores."

That there is in all of these somewhat of that repose which men regard as characteristic

of Shakespeare's Poetry will doubtless be granted; but, to what is this repose due? Possibly it will help us in this inquiry, if, instead of the above lines, in which different subjects are treated, we consider others in which the theme remains the same, while the degree of repose varies. This is true of the following, in which Shelley, Milton and Shakespeare severally celebrate the beauties of a moonlit night:

"How beautiful this night! the balmiest sigh,
Which vernal zephyrs breathe in evening's ear
Were discord to the speaking quietude
That wraps this moveless scene. Heaven's ebon vault
Studded with stars unutterably bright,
Through which the moon's unclouded grandeur rolls,
Seems like a canopy which love has spread
To curtain her sleeping world."

Queen Mab, IV.

"Now came still evening on, and twilight grey
Had in her sober livery all things clad;
Silence accompanied; for beast and bird,
They to their grassy couch, these to their nest
Were slunk; all but the wakeful nightingale,
She all night long her amorous descant sung.

Silence was pleased ; now glowed the firmament
With living sapphires ; Hesperus, that led
The starry host, rode brightest till the moon
Rising in clouded majesty at length,
Apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw."

Paradise Lost, Book IV.

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank.
Here will we sit and let the sound of music
Creep in our ears. Soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.
There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdest
But in its motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim."

Merchant of Venice.

That of these the first shall be last, and the last shall be first, all criticism will agree; Mr. Hallam going so far as to say of the last, that it is perhaps the most sublime passage in Shakespeare. However that may be, the question of immediate interest for us is: What difference is there in the structure of the above corresponding to the acknowledged difference in Repose and poetic merit?

Did we but compare the treatment of the moon in the line,

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank,"

with that in the line,

"Through which the moon's unclouded grandeur rolls,"

we might conclude with Emerson, and many others, that "good poetry is always personification," or, as Matthew Arnold has somewhere written, "in Shakespeare's poetry all things live," and so be led to infer that in this we have the ultimate fact of its characteristic repose.

But when we compare the picturing of stars as *patines of bright gold*, and as *living sapphires*, though the greater Repose and poetic merit of the former be unquestioned in our mind, yet are we not so clear as to the presence of more or greater life, certainly not in the form of a personification, or while the above test is unquestionably big with truth; yet is there some more general truth by which this is included.

Notice, then, that the sky, which to Shelley

is an "ebon vault" of cathedral grand, is to Shakespeare but the "*floor* of heaven;" and the stars, that Milton sees as living sapphires, are in greater hands but "patines of bright gold" with which the young-eyed cherubim might play; while the moon neither rises in clouded *majesty* nor in unclouded *grandeur* rolls, but, instead, the moonlight sleeps, and that, too, as sweetly as a new-born babe. Is it not, then, manifest, that while they picture these things as full grown, majestic, grand, or imposing, depending in part upon this grandeur for their effect upon us, he presents them in the swaddling clothes of a child-like simplicity, depending upon his combination of conceptions at *great remove* for his effect.

We have already learned in our corollary, that, other things being equal, the greater the remove between the conceptions, the greater the poetic merit; and it needs but a glance at the above figures to reveal the fact that while between sky and ebon vault, stars and living sapphires, moon and queen, the remove is considerable, yet is the remove, and with it the poetic merit, infinitely increased by substi-

tuting in the above the conceptions, floor, patines, and sleeping child. Nor is it, as might at first sight appear, necessary to this great remove, or to the highest Poetry, that *one* of the two conceptions brought together should be of something *grand*, etc. We do not in general so regard the conception, evening; yet is it in the hands of Milton moulded into a shape marvellous in its Repose and poetic beauty:

"Now comes still evening on, and twilight grey
Hath in her sober livery all things clad."

How the chaste beauty of this Puritan maid does turn to a glory the conventional garments of her sect,—the twilight's sober livery that all things clad. And so, while there is undoubtedly the breath of inspiration in

"The balmiest sigh
Which vernal zephyrs breathe in evening's ear,"

yet, as compared with Milton's evening, we have in this but the perturbed beauty of a Phryne whose scant robes do more reveal than is well-seeming.

Again, the conception of quiet, silence, or stillness is hardly such as we would call grand or majestic, and yet it enters into combinations of all degrees of remove:

> "The speaking quietude that wraps this moveless scene;"

or, better still, when the nightingale her amorous descant sung by *silence accompanied;* or, greater than all these, when Lorenzo says:

> "Here will we sit and let the sound of music
> Creep in our ears; soft stillness and the night
> *Become* the touches of sweet harmony;"

as the twilight's sober livery, the Puritan maid of Milton; surely the grand or majestic hath neither part nor lot in the marvellous Repose and remove of this creation. Or we find that any intangible "airy nothing" which the poet's pen would turn to shapes will make possible the general condition of great remove.

So while the Poet may avail himself of whatever pleasure he can draw from the beauty, pathos, sublimity, etc., of the scene or conception represented, yet in the highest reaches of

his art, where striving gives place to *Repose*, he seems almost to ignore the pleasure from this source, sacrificing it to the pleasure due to his own great creations. Conscious of his power to compel all things to his will, he toys with the universe, makes light of all material things, and leaves upon his work an impress of that *Repose which is manifested, when, in representing scenes or conceptions of great beauty, pathos, sublimity, etc., the Poet depends for his effect, not upon these things, but upon the remove and similarity of the conceptions brought together, or upon the greatness of his own art, creations or figures.*

It will hardly be necessary, now, to show how erroneous is the assumption that Shakespeare is unequal to the grand, etc. Take the lines from Henry IV., which Mr. Arnold, I think, quotes to show that in Shakespeare's poetry all things live :—

> " O sleep ! O gentle sleep ;
> Nature's soft nurse, how have I frighted thee.
> Wilt thou, upon the high and giddy mast,
> Seal up the sea-boy's eyes and rock his brains
> In the cradle of the rude imperious surge.

And in the visitation of the winds,
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,
Curling their monstrous heads and hanging them
With deafening clamor in the slippery clouds,
That with the hurly death itself awakes."

Truly may it be said, that in this Poet's hands all things do live and have their being; breathing into them the breath of life, he brings together conceptions at such remove, that the imposing character of wind and wave is lost in the o'er-topping grandeur of the Poet's creations; and yet "he whose imperial muse tosses creation like a bauble," he who, by his most potent art, the strong-based promontory made shake; bedimmed the noontide sun; called forth the mutinous winds, and twixt the green sea and azure vault set roaring water, is, they tell us, unequal to such things. Nay, rather is it true that he has realized, as no other Poet has, that neither mountain nor meadow; height nor depth; things past nor things to come, are necessary to the highest poetry; but that the genius of the Poet, like that of the Philosopher, depends upon his insight into the subtile relations between the

phenomena of life and nature, and hence may find full play amid the homeliest and least romantic things of this work-a-day world. To one so gifted, the barest room is crowded with possible suggestions of the greatest Poetry; a key, the chest it unlocks, a coat, or a closet in which it hangs, all things whatsoever, may by a sweet compulsion be made to serve his will, and become the local habitation of some airy nothing.

"So am I as the rich whose blessed *key*
Can bring him to his *up-locked* treasure,
The which he will not every hour survey,
For blunting the fine point of seldom pleasure."

. . . . . .

"So is the time that keeps you as my *chest*,
Or as the *wardrobe* which the *robe* doth hide,
To make some special instant special blest
By new unfolding his imprisoned pride."

52d Sonnet.

Here we are enabled to lay hands on the soul of truth in the cry, that has gone up of late, that American Poetry should be American, for while it is undoubtedly true that men may write great Poetry about scenes and

incidents from the days of chivalry or antiquity, yet is it equally true of these, as of the beautiful, the sublime, etc., that in the highest reaches of his art the Poet ignores them all. Let us close with the following lines from Emerson, whom we cannot quote too often:

"'Tis easy to repaint the mythology of the Greeks, or of the Catholic Church, the feudal castle, the crusade, the martyrdom of Mediæval Europe; but to point out where the same creative force is now working in our own houses and public assemblies to convert the vivid energies acting at this hour in New York and Chicago and San Francisco, into *universal symbols*, requires a subtile and commanding thought."

Healthfulness.

DOES it seem a work of supererogation to seek for a definition of healthfulness? Note, then, what Mr. Matthew Arnold has written: "As compared with Leopardi, Wordsworth, though at many points less lucid, though far less a master of style, far less an artist, gains so much by his *criticism of life* being, in certain matters of profound importance, *healthful and true*, whereas Leopardi's pessimism is not that the value of Wordsworth's poetry, on the whole, stands higher for us than that of Leopardi."

Note, too, that to this Mr. Alfred Austin, a critic of no mean ability, takes exception, declaring that "there is no consensus either among poets or their readers as to what is

true and healthful criticism of life." Grant this, and it is manifest that a definition of healthfulness, is impossible, since all definition must find its ultimate basis in the substantial agreement of men. That there are differences of opinion none will question, but if, as Mr. Austin has written, criticism of life is passing judgment upon life, or, better still, is philosophy of life, does it not appear a strange statement that no consensus should exist in regard to the healthfulness of this philosophy of life?

Take his own definition that "Poetry is a transfiguration of life," and is it not manifest that the transfiguration will be more or less modified by the Poet's estimate, criticism, or philosophy of life; will be healthful or otherwise, according as his views of life are healthful or the reverse? This, mind you, is far from saying that the healthfulness of the philosophy contained in any lines is the measure of their poetic merit, our position on this being already clearly defined; but that there is some substantial agreement as to what is a true and healthful criticism or philosophy of life there can be no question.

Nay, more; for though men may be at odds as to the comparative healthfulness of Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth; yet are they just as certainly agreed that in this regard Shakespeare stands head and shoulders over all.

What then is the basis of this agreement? What sins of omission or commission are chargeable to Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth, of which Shakespeare is innocent?

Answer might be made, that many hold Byron to be unhealthful because pessimistic, immoral, sensational, unrefined, etc. The ills of life, and the failure of established institutions, marriage, religion, etc., are shown, not as they are, but in exaggerated dimensions, while the good of these things is belittled. Again, courage, address, etc., are shown, not merely as admirable in their way, but are blazoned forth in such strong light as to blur your impression of the less sensational virtues, faithfulness to marriage vows, content, etc. Violence is done our instinctive refinement, not by the mention of things usually considered unmentionable, but by the placing of them in abnormal and unseemly juxtaposition with the fairest, sweetest things in life.

So, too, in regard to Shelley's Poetry, while it is seldom or never unrefined, yet, like Byron, it at times belittles or subverts the best in life, or is pessimistic, immoral, sensational, etc.

Such a list of offenses, however, is hardly satisfactory as criterion of healthfulness, implying, as it does, a certain flagrance, while as a matter of fact a Poet may be innocent on each and all of the above counts, and yet, to the minds of many, fail somewhat of perfect healthfulness. In dealing with the relations between the sexes he may tend to ignore or to expurgate all passion, that which God hath joined together, passion and affection, he would put asunder in beggarly divorcement. Viewing life like Wordsworth from his secluded retreat in the lake country, he may lack sympathy with its foibles and temptations; for, as Mr. Arnold has written, without in any way contradicting his previous statement:

> "Wordsworth averts his ken
> From half of human fate."

That which Byron and Shelley unduly exaggerate, he as unduly belittles, showing

that on the length of the spoon which they have reflected from its width; or though he offend no law of the decalogue, yet, like them, he represents partial or *distorted views of life*. Here, then, we have the basis of a criterion of healthfulness, which, though not startling in its novelty, has yet some present interest for us, since it is of such generality as to include all of the above specific charges. Nor does its value depend upon the sustaining of these charges against the above-mentioned Poets; for, in any event, this remains true, that any Poetry that does distort life is unhealthful.

'Tis true, an exaggeration of a particular phase of life seems sometimes necessary to the well-being of the mind diseased, much as poisons do medicine the body; yet would we not speak of one or the other as being in any ordinary sense of the term healthful.

But let us now bring the above to the test of that substantial agreement, which we found to exist, namely: That Shakespeare is more healthful than either of the above Poets. If in the above we have the true basis for our definition, then must it follow, that in his Poetry we shall find

less belittling of one interest and exaggeration of another, less distortion, than in theirs.

Remembering, as Wordsworth has said, that the sonnet is the key with which Shakespeare unlocked his heart, let us turn to these, and we shall find that though, like Byron, a sometime companion of harlots, yet does he never attempt to o'er-green vice with the forms and shows of virtue. Tempted in all points like as we are, yet does he never part the cable of his virtuous instincts.

"Alas! 'tis true, I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
Made old offences of affections new!
Most true it is, that I have looked on Truth
Askance and strangely; but, by all above,
These blenches gave my heart another youth,
And worse essays proved thee my best of love.
Now all is done save what shall have no end.
Mine appetite, I never more will grind
On newer proof, to try an older friend,
O God in love, to whom I am confined!
Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,
Even to thy pure and most, most loving breast."

Sonnet 110.

Even in the hour of sensual gratification, the tinsel of vice is to him tinsel still.

"When my love swears she's made of truth,
I do believe her, though I know she lies."

Familiar with the brave and courtly, he neither belittles them nor shows them in such high and sensational light as to blind you to the excellence of the humbler parts of the picture. Again, though taking cognizance of things more questionable than those with which Byron has offended, yet is he seldom unhealthful in this regard; for such things are rarely forced into violent juxtaposition with the most delicate flavors of life, but are shown in their true relation to all else. It is Stephano and Trunculo that are betrayed into the mishap of the pool, not Ferdinand and Miranda. Seldom moralizing, he yet finds a soul of truth in the most absurd superstitions.

Marcellus:

"It faded on the crowing of the cock.
Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long;

> And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad.
> The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
> No fairy takes, nor witch has power to charm,
> So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

Horatio:

> *So have I heard, and do in part believe it.*
>
> *Hamlet*, Act I., Scene 1.

Protestant or Catholic, who shall say? for Puritan and priest are painted with like impartial hand. Pessimistic? We trow not. Nay, rather is it in this that his healthfulness is most marked.

Mr. Ruskin, I think it is, enters complaint that Shakespeare never had any great object in life; doubtless meaning some such Utopian scheme as that upon which he himself has so generously expended his inheritance. Now, while this may be true as to the fact, yet is the implied exception, that therein Shakespeare lacks somewhat of perfect healthfulness, not well taken.

For, though differing most widely, yet have Byron's scheme of Greek independence and Ruskin's ideal community this in common:

both exaggerate the failures of established institutions, and belittle their good; both fall short of that healthful philosophy of life which realizes that all things work together for good; that the social institutions of any time are, on the whole, the best for the needs of the time. Exaggerating our own importance in the eternal economy, we fancy that with imperfect men we can construct an ideal or perfect social structure, and so engage in schemes which, like those of Mr. Ruskin, though laudable in their promptings, are yet the outcome of a limited knowledge of life. In the provincialism of our wealth or culture, we overestimate the value of these as factors in the problem of life's happiness. Forgetting that the best things in life—virtue, content, etc.—are possible to the least of fortune's favorites, we cry out, "Is not culture more than virtue, and wealth more than content?" But mark the difference:

"Sir, I am a true laborer. I earn that I eat, get that I wear; owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness; glad of other men's good, content with my harm; and the greatest of my

pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck." So saith Corin in "As You Like It."

Again, he who was familiar with court and courtesans, the most wise fool, Touchstone, saith of his Audrey: "A poor humor of mine, sir, to take that that no man will." Not that he blinds himself to the value of culture; for, "Truly I would the gods had made thee poetic." Still, "A poor humor of mine, sir; an ill-favored thing, *but mine own*." Is not the healthfulness of this in keeping with the fact that Shakespeare, having gained a competence, and returning to his native town, indulges in no Utopian scheme for the benefit of its poor, gives rise to no excrescence upon the body politic, but, instead, he appears on record as member of a committee to secure from Parliament a subsidy for the town of Stratford, then fallen in decay?

Again: he who had written in the assurance of his genius,—

> "So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
> So long lives this, and this gives life to thee;"

he who had been flattered by, and had charmed,

a circle in which the genius of a Jonson stood not alone, returns to his native town, and takes upon himself the least regarded public duties as road overseer. Aye, he who had been one with the simple folk of this world in their struggle for existence, knew too well their needs and possibilities to indulge in any maudlin sentiment in their behalf, offering them instead a profound respect.

On the other hand, Byron and Shelley, and to a less degree Ruskin, all born to an inheritance, all bemoan the ills of this work-a-day world or all lack somewhat of perfect healthfulness. Truly has it been written how hardly shall a rich man enter into that kingdom in which the unregarded of this world are looked upon, not as objects of pity, but of respect. For this thing cometh not but by the fasting and prayer of the struggle for existence.

Marvelous as was Shakespeare's insight into the motives of action, wondrous as was his poetic genius, yet was he greater than all these in this universality of his sympathy. Having proved all things, he had regard to all things,

and would neither add to nor subtract one jot or tittle from the greatest or least respected things of life.

But to bring this to a conclusion, while the Poet may avail himself of this healthfulness, as he does of the beauty, pathos, sublimity, etc., of the scene or conception represented, or as an additional source of pleasure, still may his lines be never so unhealthy and yet evidence great poetic genius.

Holding this in regard may we not write:

Healthfulness in Poetry, as in all literature and all art, is the representing of life without distortion.

Humor.

THAT Poetry and Humor have much in common, may not at first sight appear, so different are they in their effect upon us. And yet when we find critics of undoubted ability declaring of the same lines: one, that they are poetic; and the other, that they are humorous, we begin to doubt whether the difference is as clearly marked as we had fancied. And yet that there is an essential and abiding difference, and hence, that any definition either of Poetry or of Humor, to be complete must take cognizance of this difference, cannot be gainsaid, while the question, Does the definition of Poetry developed in a previous article satisfy this condition? becomes a most pertinent one.

We can best answer this question by first determining the ultimate and essential conditions of Humor, and in so doing will, as heretofore, avail ourselves of all previous efforts in this direction. We saw that all attempts to define Poetry could for practical purposes, be included under one or the other of two definitions. So too we find that many and various as have been the attempts to determine the cause of humorous amusement, they all array themselves under one or the other of the following:

Mr. Bain writes: "The occasion of the ludicrous is the degradation of some person or interest possessing dignity in circumstances that excite no other strong emotion."

On the other hand Dr. Johnson says:

"Wit is a 'discordia concors,' a combination of dissimilar images."

Though different terms are here employed, —wit and the ludicrous,—yet may these definitions be accepted as typical of all attempts to define that generic Humor which includes any and all sources of humorous amusement. Not only so, but as in Poetry, so here, we hope to

show, that, despite their seeming contradiction, these are but the complements of each other, so that any satisfactory definition must take note of the truth contained in each of them.

That degradation is present in many phases of generic Humor may not be denied, and yet it might be urged against the first of the above definitions, that degradation may, and oft-times does, give rise to pity or other strong emotions. To meet this objection, Mr. Bain adds the qualifying clause that the degradation shall be "in circumstances that excite no other strong emotion;" yet is this far from satisfactory, for since the amusement and the other strong emotion are both due to degradation, there must needs be some difference in the character of the degradation, corresponding to this difference in effect, or it is in some peculiar phase of degradation that we must look for the basis of a definition of generic Humor.

When a dignified divine follows, in fruitless chase, his erring hat, which, in gamesome mood, seems to await his near approach, only to be again caught up on the wings of frolic, we are amused, and as certainly have a person

in some sense degraded. But notice this, that while in his pursuit of not very noble game, the divine is like a boy at an age when he is the contradiction of all dignity; yet the divine does not forfeit our respect, or it is not an *absolute degradation.*

Cervantes represents his redoubtable knight as awaiting the approach of the merchants of Toledo:—

"When they were come so near as to be seen and heard, Don Quixote raised his voice and with an arrogant air cried out: '*Let the whole world stand*, if the whole world does not confess that there is not in the whole world a damsel more beautiful, etc., etc.'" So imbued is his mind with this knight errantry that his faith in it naught can shake. She whom he has elevated to the sublime place in his mind, of Dulcinea del Toboso, was in reality an unseemly, ignorant, country wench, with naught of the ideal about her, save an almost forgotten affair between them; and yet out of this slight element of actuality all her ideal charms are created, holding existence in his mind beyond a peradventure. "And it's no

great matter if it is another hand, for by what I can remember Dulcinea can neither write nor read." And yet is it not true that, despite his high-gravel blindness in this regard, we continue to think of the Don as sensible upon other subjects.

Even Sir Andrew Aguecheek, whom, at best, we do not regard as over-wise, becomes most amusing when he appears as more of a fool than he is in reality. When Maria invites Sir Toby and him to witness the success of her trick upon the high and lofty Malvolio, the former indicates his willingness to accompany her and his appreciation of the trick by saying: "To the gates of Tartar, thou most excellent devil of wit!" At this Sir Andrew, who, mind you, is utterly incapable of even the semblance of a joke, says: "I'll make one too." What excellent foolery!

He himself well knows the impossibility of this, and yet, through his desire to have or retain Sir Toby's favor, which Maria had recently monopolized, he is betrayed into this foolishness, thus seeming more of a fool than he is in reality. In neither of these in-

stances is the degradation absolute. Assume, for the sake of argument, that the divine, Don Quixote and Sir Andrew are without "mitigation or remorse" the fools they seem, and what results? Can you laugh at an idiot? instead, are you not compelled to pity him? Or, if the degradation becomes absolute, the amusement ceases, "giving place to other strong emotions."

But why, or how, does this change in the character of the degradation result in such change in its effect upon us? For an answer to this turn to the divine, and is it not manifest, that in his incomplete degradation he makes present to the mind, at one and the same time, two pictures or conceptions of himself, one as dignified and the other as degraded, or that this incompleteness of his degradation results in what Johnson has called a combination of dissimilar images. Make the degradation absolute, and you destroy one of these images, that of the divine as dignified, and a "combination," a "discordia concors," is rendered impossible, since there is now but one image or conception present in the mind.

The amusement ceasing not as Mr. Bain would have us infer, because there is present in the mind the conditions both of amusement and of other strong emotions, only the latter is the more powerful of the two, but because the conditions of amusement have disappeared, giving place to conditions of other strong emotions, as pity, or the degradation is now such as cannot give rise to a *discordia concors*, but must awaken other strong emotions.

Turning to Puns, Parodies and Witticisms in general, little difficulty is experienced in recognizing in them the presence of "discordia concors," while, on the other hand, the degradation is not always so obvious as in the previous examples, Mr. Herbert Spencer going so far as to say that Puns might be produced in which no degradation can be found. For the present, however, let us note that between Don Quixote's challenge and a Pun there is a difference, which men have sought to indicate by calling one Humor (specific), and the other Wit. And while the attempts to define these terms have not met with any signal success,

yet is the difference, though somewhat vaguely recognized, a real and substantial one.

If, as Coleridge has suggested, there is in some way the same relation between these as between Imaginative and Fanciful Poetry, we may obtain some help in our present inquiry, from a previous article. For while in all Poetry, we have both the thought and the figure, in which the thought finds utterance, yet in Imaginative Poetry the thought, the utility, and in Fanciful Poetry the figure or combination, is the more important factor; or, here as elsewhere, "what nature creates for use, she afterward turns to beauty."

So too, it seems probable, that in all Humor (generic) we have both the degradation or utility, and the combination by which this is effected, yet in Humor (specific) as in Imaginative Poetry, the degradation or utility is of greater moment than in Wit; while in the latter, as in Fanciful Poetry, the combination has existence more because of its own delightfulness, than because it subserves the purpose of any degradation.

This, too, is coherent with the claim, that

the earliest manifestations of Humor (generic) are in the form of practical jokes, Samson loosing the foxes in the standing corn of the Philistines, or slaying their thousands with the jaw-bone of an ass, displaying a grim sort of Humor in the insignificance of the weapons employed. Or, in this actual injury of enemies, in such a manner as made them appear less than they were in reality, we have it may be, the utility from which has been evolved all forms of generic Humor. And as in all Poetry, even the most Fanciful, there is still some warp of thought; so it seems probable, that in all Humor (generic), in the quickest and most brilliant witticism, there is still some flavor of degradation.

But while it has appeared in what Poetry and Humor (generic) are alike, the combining or bringing together of conceptions at remove, etc., it has not as yet been shown in what they differ.

Notice, then, that examples may be produced, one poetic and the other humorous, in which the conceptions brought together are practically the same. For instance, we may

personify a bell, and speak of it as telling the sad news, while Hood writes:

> "The parson told the sexton,
> And the sexton tolled the bell."

That in both of these the conceptions brought together are a bell tolling and a person telling something is manifest; hence the difference cannot be in the character of the conceptions brought together, nor yet in the remove between them.

In our extremity we turn to the bond between these conceptions, to inquire if there be not some difference there. With what result? This, that while in the first example the conceptions are merely *similar* in one or more elements, in the second they are brought together because the words told and tolled are in sound the *same*.

So in Witticisms in general, as when Porson, hearing some one remark, of certain modern poets, that they would be remembered long after Homer and Virgil were forgotten, replied, "And not till then."

The point of this manifestly depends

upon the fact that he adopts entire the language of the first speaker, and so seeming at first to convey the same idea, he yet by a slight addition conveys the directly opposite idea. Or, conceptions at remove are brought together, because the language employed, is in a large measure the *same*.

In Parodies it is the *same* metrical structure, while in the divine's unseemly caper, Don Quixote's challenge, or Sir Andrew's aside, the *same* person is conceived as more or less wise and as foolish; or, if a like relation existed between all the elements of the conceptions brought together, we might say of them, not merely as in Poetry, that they are similar, but that they are identical or coincide throughout. Hence the definition—*in Humor* (*generic*) *we have that degradation which results in a "discordia concors," in a combining or bringing together conceptions at remove by means of coincidence, thus creating a new conception, which, as we shall see hereafter, is of no long continuance.*

Turning again to the divine's pursuit of not very noble game, we see that the more

dignified he is in general, and the more he is like a boy, in this one instance of the lapse of his dignity, the more we are amused; or, as the greatest Poetry is the result of maximum remove with the maximum similarity, so the *greatest Humor (generic) is the result of maximum remove and maximum coincidence.*

Again, in applying this, we find, that just as the greatest Poetry is in general Imaginative, as distinguished from the Fanciful, so the greatest Humor (generic) is in general to be found in specific Humor, as distinguished from Wit, in a Don Quixote, or a "Twelfth Night," and not in the reply of a Porson, or the couplet of Hood.

It has not yet appeared, however, that the above distinction between similarity and coincidence will account for the well-known difference between Poetry and Humor (generic) in their effect upon us.

For a better understanding of this, let us turn to an article of Mr. Spencer's, on "The Physiology of Laughter." Ignoring some of the more refined distinctions, one can quote him in a general way, as saying: That any

disturbance of the nervous system, or force set in motion, must expend itself either in mental or muscular activities, or in both of these. If, from any cause, the discharge through one of these channels as mental activities is interrupted, this force must find vent in some way, and, hence, more must be taken up in muscular action; and if the force is without special direction, it will naturally set in motion those muscles most readily moved, those most frequently in use, or the muscles of the throat and chest, used in talking, respiration, and likewise in laughter. When the acrobat has made an astonishing leap over a number of horses, and the clown comes running after with great energy, as though he would far surpass the acrobat, and then stops suddenly at the first horse, and pretends to brush off a fly, the audience screams. By the energy of his preliminary run, he has led them to expect a wonderful jump; a large amount of nervous force was set in motion, but his "most lame and impotent conclusion" interrupts the discharge of this force through mental channels, so compelling it to find vent in muscular

activities, and the half-convulsive action we call laughter ensues.

That this is big with truth we must perforce grant; yet is the statement made farther on, that "laughter naturally results only when consciousness is unawares transferred from great things to small, misleading in the extreme, for examples may be produced, as instance Porson's reply, in which there is no difference in greatness between the conceptions with which the mind is employed.

We have seen, however, that, in Humor (generic), the combination is due to coincidence; and so the mind recognizing that the conceptions coincide in one or more elements, is prone to assume that the same relation exists between all their elements, or that they coincide throughout; but since the conceptions are in reality at great remove, or in their more important elements essentially different, we no sooner impose one upon the other than their non-coincidence in these elements is revealed; the new conception resulting from the attempted combination is hardly created, before its impossibility is flashed upon the mind, or its birth is its death.

Here, by the by, is Whately's fallacy; Shoepenhauer's triumph of intuition over reflection; or Dumont's "that of which the mind is forced to affirm and deny the same thing at the same time." But what must be the result of this self-destructive character of the new conception?

Manifestly this, that the mind is left without anything with which to occupy itself, not because the mind is "unawares transferred from great things to small," in any ordinary sense in which we employ the terms, but because the conception resulting from the combination, though extremely novel, and so setting in motion a large body of nervous force, is yet self-destructive, and hence the force set in motion must find vent in muscular action, and laughter results.

In Poetry, on the other hand, in which the combination is due to similarity, you are never, even for a moment, betrayed into the notion, that the conceptions coincide throughout or are identical, but instead, you are at all times conscious that they are but similar.

The new conception, therefore, is not self-

destructive, but remains for the mind to brood over, or the force set in motion, finding vent in mental channels, laughter does not ensue. This suggests a solution for a problem that has troubled all attempts to analyze Humor, namely: In what does the Humor which gives rise to a laugh differ from that which only provokes a smile?

We have already seen that Wit differs from specific Humor, in the greater dominance of the combination; but not contented with this, we ofttimes impose upon it the further limitation, that it shall be quick, apropos, and so are apt to call witty all quick, apropos combinations, whether they are in method, humorous or poetic. If the former, then, as we have seen, it will give rise to a laugh; but if the latter, it can, at the most, but provoke a smile; or as the combination passes from the humorous to the poetic, coincidence giving place to similarity, the laugh gives place to the smile, and this to what a German called "a smile in the depths of his consciousness."

Resume.

THROUGH all the wanderings of our argument thus far, we have striven to keep before the minds of our readers as the fundamental proposition, that:—*Poetry is the expressing of thought by means of figure; by the substitution of the concrete for the abstract; or by the bringing together or combining of conceptions at remove, because of a similarity between them, thus creating a new conception.*

Let us now pass in brief review the arguments that led to this conclusion. In the first place, we found a substantial agreement among men to the effect that the measure of poetic merit must be found either in the character of the thought expressed, or

in the character of the figures employed. In deciding between these, we saw that while thought is in some sense essential, figure being impossible, save as it expresses some thought, yet it is not peculiar to Poetry.

Again, while the beauty, pathos, sublimity, healthfulness, etc., of the scene, conception or thought represented is important as an additional source of pleasure; nay, more, while the character of the thought may sometimes be a fair measure of poetic excellence, the greatness of the thought reacting upon the mind of the poet, stimulating it to the creation of figures otherwise impossible, etc., yet did we find that the character of the thought could not be relied upon as a measure of poetic values, since examples may be produced differing most widely in poetic merit, in which, nevertheless, the scene, conception or thought is the same in both, and hence we concluded that Poetry is the expressing of thought by means of figure. But a definition, to be satisfactory, must be exclusive as well as inclusive; and bringing the above to this test, we found that it served to distinguish Poetry from Prose,

or the scientific mode of expressing thought, in this that while the latter tends to substitute the abstract for the concrete, the former substitutes the concrete for the abstract.

So, too, while we found the genius of Poet and Philosopher are evidenced in operations that are identical—the bringing together of conceptions at remove by means of similarity —yet do they differ in the purpose for which this combination is effected, and in the general nervous condition under which their intellect operates; one seeking to express a truth, and the other to develop a further truth.

From painting, sculpture, etc., Poetry is, of course, distinguished by the material in which it works,—language; while from Humor (generic), in which we have a like bringing together of conceptions at remove, it differs in the character of the bond by which these conceptions are combined,—similarity in one, coincidence in the other, etc. In thus showing that our definition was sufficiently exclusive, we have been led to define, with more or less precision, those things in regard to which confusion might arise. The definition of Humor

(generic) we were at some pains to formulate, and found that it not only reconciled differences, but was, also, in keeping with the theory of Laughter developed by Mr. Herbert Spencer.

Then, again, as a definition of Poetry must needs lack completeness if it fails to contain a possible explanation of the difference between Imaginative and Fanciful Poetry, so a definition of Humor (generic) should contain a possible explanation of the difference between Humor (specific) and Wit. In accordance with this, we saw that while in all Poetry we have both the thought and the combination by which it is expressed, yet in Imaginative the thought, and in Fanciful the combination, is the more dominant factor. So, too, while in all Humor (generic) you have both the degradation and the combination, yet in Humor (specific) the degradation, and in Wit the combination, is the more conspicuous figure. Thereby justifying the surmise of Coleridge, that in some way the same relation exists between Humor (specific) and Wit as between Imaginative and Fanciful Poetry.

This suggested a solution for the problem that has troubled all attempts to define Humor (generic), namely: In what does the Humor which gives rise to a laugh differ from that which only provokes a smile? To this, answer was made: As coincidence is changed to similarity, the laugh must needs give place to a smile, etc.

Among the few formulated beliefs, about which there is a substantial agreement among critics is this:—That there is in the highest Poetry, a certain characteristic simplicity or *repose*. This, we found, was in entire keeping with our definition of Poetry, and so were led to define this repose. We saw, also, that under the impulse of any deep feeling or passion, the mind found the Scientific or Prose mode of expressing thought all too slow for the press of jostling thoughts, and so was compelled to find vent for these in figure, or as is frequently said, Poetry is the natural language of passion. Even the essentially absurd notion that all we have to do, to write great Poetry, is to feel deeply, found, in the above truth, some justification. So, too, the somewhat incoherent

cry that American Poetry should be American, was found to be big with truth; while in the progress of science, we found not a foreboding, but a promise, of the future possibilities of Poetry; or, our definition conforms itself to this great test of truth—that it lives not unto itself alone, but that with it must stand or fall a large body of collateral truth.

Some one has said we should doubt our conclusions about Poetry when they differ from the Poets; let us bring our definition to this further test, confident that it will not fail us here.

We have already seen, as Sir Philip Sidney has written, that: "It is not rhyming or versing that maketh a poet, but it is the feigning of notable images, of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching which must be the right describing note to know a poet by . . . . . he coupleth the general notion with the particular example."

To this Shakespeare has given more poetic expression in his "Midsummer Night's Dream."

"The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy."

"Poetry," says Shelley, "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar." Elsewhere he writes: "It creates, but it creates by combination and representation."

"Poetical abstractions are beautiful and new, not because the proportions of which they are composed had no previous existence in the mind of man or in nature, but because the whole produced by their combination, has some intelligible and beautiful analogy with the sources of emotion and thought."

Leigh Hunt writes: "Poetry begins where matters of fact or of science ceases to be merely such, and to exhibit a further truth;" again he says: "Poetry is imaginative passion,"

or as Milton has written : " Poetry in comparison with science is simple, sensuous and passionate."

Again, our own Emerson has written : " Poetry is the perpetual endeavor to express the spirit of things. Its essential mark is, that it betrays in every word instant activity of mind, shown in new uses of every fact and image, in preternatural quickness of perception of relations ; all its words are poems."

Yea, even so long ago as the Chaldean Zoroaster, it was written : " Poets are standing transporters, whose employment consists in speaking to the father and to matter ; in producing apparent imitations of unapparent nature, and inscribing things unapparent to the apparent fabrication of the world."

As definitions, most of these are far from satisfactory, sometimes vague, and ofttimes contradicting themselves and each other ; and yet finding in our definition a solvent for all their contradictions, we can say of one " That's true " and of another " That's true too."

Summing up the evidence, then, we find,

that besides the *a priori* and *a posteriori* considerations developed in the earlier pages of the discussion, our definition has the further warrant of the two great tests of truth—"it lives not unto itself alone," and "comes not to destroy, but to fulfill."

Times Printing House,
Philadelphia, Pa.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 013 386 827 6